

# Once and Twice Missed

Sometimes the fates are thwarted and what seems destined to be lost somehow miraculously reappears. Such is the case about two books with outstanding provenance advertised by a prominent London bookseller. Apparently even bookseller policies and unwillingness--or neglect--to directly quote outstanding Mosher material couldn't keep these books from eventually making their way into the collection--with the help of a super-hero bookseller, that is. In the account below I move from my initial regrets to a partial win, and then a final resolution in the "Third Time's the Charm" section of this essay.

## From Regrets over Two Inscribed Copies...

Even though I owed money to a collector from whom I bought some wonderful Mosher material on terms, and even though I my finances were low, nevertheless, when I received a catalogue on October 11, 2002 from the firm XXX XXX, I telephoned immediately. The catalogue, XXX's XXXth, entitled "Poetry--The S. N-S Collection," offered two delightful items that I needed to have. I immediately telephoned to order (hell, I'd get the money somehow), but the burden of increased debt was avoided: both were sold! The items which the Bishop collection will apparently never contain are: (1) Entry 93: Gordon Bottomley's Japan vellum copy of *A Vision of Giorgione* (Mosher, 1910) inscribed to his wife, the dedicatee, and with an original poem by GB for his wife, and (2) George Meredith's *Modern Love* (Mosher, 1891)--one of ten large paper copies printed on Japan vellum, specially bound in a Chivers binding, and inscribed as a gift to Meredith's close friend Lady Jean Palmer.

I had shared a booth at the New York Book Fair with XXX XXX (XXX XXX's son), kept in touch with him via e-mail, my wife visited them two years ago and had tea with XXX and his father, and together we visited their shop a year ago. Of course, every time I reminded them that if you "have any Mosher... Keep me in mind, etc." and left my "wants list." To crown it all XXX XXX wrote a review of my Mosher bibliography. Guess I make little of an impression. No quote, no nothing. Just the catalogue rub it in my face with its two sold items. Oh it's so nice to be out of the loop...! Upon hearing about this, one of my bookseller friends wrote "That's really not fair. These people knew of your interest and the importance of your collection. Not contacting you is unkind, and very rude. I think you have every right to write and complain to XXX. It's not like you risk losing their favour! XXX sure does owe you an explanation if not an apology. But then again, look at the brighter side: you have saved about \$2000. Yeah, I know, small consolation; You're right: write the bastard." Actually I had beaten him to the punch and had written to XXX--the hour within which I had received the catalogue--in a bit more diplomatic tone than that suggested by my friend--but was told that the book had been sold. The following is a record of our brief exchange:

October 11, 2002

XXX:

Congratulation on your Catalogue XXX, "Poetry--The S. N-S Collection". How fabulous! Upon receiving I immediately called to order #93 (Bottomley's *Vision of Giorgione*, Mosher ed., inscribed) and #512 (Meredith's *Modern Love*, Mosher ed., inscribed). How disappointing that not one but both were already sold. Apparently it just took too long for your wonderful catalogue to reach me, and I do very much appreciate receiving it no matter what the outcome. It's a treat to read over. Please do remember my ongoing wants for good Mosher Press material like this. After writing the Mosher bibliography, I've continued to collect all good thing related to Thomas Bird Mosher, including a number of association copies. You can always see what I'm up to in the Bishop Collection of Mosher books as touched upon at [website address]

Thanks again for sending the catalogue, and perhaps next time you might even want to drop me an advance note about such entries as the Bottomley and the Meredith.

Best wishes to both you and your father,

Phil

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Five days later I received a response from XXX who indicated he did think of me when he catalogued the two Mosher items, but that they wanted their private customers to have "first crack at this catalogue" and that he'd let me "know of any one-offs" the might come across. I responded immediately on that same day:

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October 16, 2002

XXX:

For material like that, PLEASE look upon me as a retail customer willing to pay FULL PRICE, just like your private customers. Run of the mill stuff, don't bother, but one of a kind with important inscriptions, that's a different story and I'm willing to step up to the plate to pay full price if it's really good material like that in the catalogue. Thanks for getting back to me, but very disappointed to know you even thought of me when cataloguing those items but passed me by. In the future just send me an e-mail, let me know this item would usually be reserved for your private customers, but willing to offer at full price as a courtesy to me. Those items would have been nice additions for the greatest Mosher collection in the world (big whoop).

Chagrined, but thankful you got back to me.

Phil

So it goes, you win some and you lose some, and in all fairness to XXX XXX, I can understand that a book dealer will want to contact his retail customers first public rather than offering them to a fellow bookseller who usually gets a 10% professional courtesy discount sometimes given to fellow members of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers. This was one of those few times that I'm aware of when my bookseller status has worked against me, and I only wished XXX had picked up the phone or written an e-mail when he got that "flash" while cataloguing these two Mosher books, but as another friend observed after reading about the outcome, "indeed you are more measured than I would have been. But your reply to him might do the trick if he now considers you a

‘private and full paying customer.’ There will be other temptations amigo!” Yes, surely there will be other temptations, and perhaps now I’m on the right track with the distinguished firm of XXX XXX in London. At least I hope I am. For now, however, that lovely XXX XXX catalogue has earned a place in the Mosher collection as a record (and unfortunate reminder) of those two books now out of reach.

## ...to a Partially Happy Ending

Some time after this an American dealer who had purchased one of the books at XXX's full price offered it to me. Apparently he bought it, kept it for a while, mulled over what to do, set it on a shelf, and then finally got around to offering it to me. I accepted his generous terms for what was fully described in the S. N.-S. catalogue:

Entry 512. Meredith (George). *MODERN LOVE*. Foreword by E. Cavazza. Thomas B. Mosher, Portland, Maine, 1891. Pirated Edition. Of 50 Large Paper copies, this is **one of ten numbered copies** [this being copy #3] **on Japan vellum signed by the publisher** (probably the copy that Mosher sent to the author). 4to. **Presentation Binding**, contemporary brown calf, sides with triple fillet gilt, upper cover with central monogram "JEAN", spine elaborately gilt with brown morocco labels, inner dentelles and edges gilt, watered silk end-papers. Half-title. Binding a little rubbed and slightly stained, otherwise a very nice copy. **Presentation Copy inscribed by the author on the title-page "To Jean: Who knows as little of it as the Moon / The tides she attracts: From, By permission of Walter, Her George"**: with the presentee, Jean Palmer's bookplate [and bookplate of S. N.-S.]. Buxton Forman 9. £600 [orig. British price]

*Jean Palmer was wife of Sir Walter Palmer, a wealthy biscuit manufacturer. The two loved to entertain artistic and literary celebrities at their town and country residences and Meredith was extremely fond of them, as this inscription suggests. He referred to her as "Queen Jean" at her glittering receptions. ---"POETRY: The S. N.-S. Collection" Catalogue XXX (London: XXX XXX, 2002)*

[You can see a color portrait of Jean's husband, Sir Walter Palmer (1858-1910), by Frederick Sandys on the Internet]

Actually when that dealer first contacted me and told me what he had and how he got it and that he paid XXX XXX full price for it, I swallowed hard thinking to myself “Here we go, buy low, sell high, and if his low was already a steep price, then how much higher would I have to pay?” I really expected the worst and consequently braced myself--after all, I had to say yes to whatever he wanted--, but was utterly and pleasantly surprised, in fact almost dumbfounded, because what he asked for was 10% over what he paid for the book (including his shipping cost). Anyway, the whole thing, post paid, cost me \$1,100 which isn't too bad considering the following.

This association copy fills a hole in the collection in that not only is it Mosher's first book inscribed by the author, but it's also the only copy of the one of ten printed on Japan vellum which I've ever been able to purchase. I've seen two others, one in Jim Cummins' Mosher collection (copy #9), in rather plain leather binding, and the copy (#7) from Mosher's library bought by Norman Strouse at the 1948 Mosher sale. But that's it, I never saw another copy in any institutional collection I visited nor have any come on the market. I can't help but conclude that this was the copy which Meredith wrote of when he wrote to Mosher, "Sir, a handsome pirate is always half pardoned, and in this case he has

broken only the upper laws. I shall receive with pleasure the copy of *Modern Love* which you propose to send. I have it much at heart that works of mine should be read by Americans." (*Letters*, 1399) and then later sending a note indicating, "I have received the Copy of *Modern Love*, and my previous letter has come to your hands, I may suppose. Your edition of the work is most creditable. In England the sumptuous edition is devoted only to very favourite writers. I cannot say it is generally an example of refinement. One has to look to France for an equal to your production; and there seems a probability that Americans will rival the French in the issue of books that honour their stands." (*Letters*, 1405) S. N.-S. wrote in the book that this was probably the copy that Mosher sent to the author, and a Canadian colleague of mine-actually a fellow Mosher enthusiast-- shared his thoughts on the matter:

As for the comments on whether it is 'the copy' I lean towards it being the one. This for a couple of reasons. The first, Mosher would have been particularly interested in ingratiating himself with Meredith, it being his first effort. A small paper copy would not have done. Second. I think any dedication might not have been written in the book itself to preserve it's quality. I don't see it as a gift but as an offering which is slightly different. I think Mosher would have written a letter to go along with it, separate. I sense, and I here go out on a limb, Mosher was not confident of his own powers of production to assert himself by copying into the book. He became so later but I think he would not have been that forward to advance the piece in that way. Third. I think the rarity of the item would have precluded Meredith from purchasing a Japan vellum one post-production. If he would have done so it would likely have to have been a small paper copy. It would bear checking to see how quickly Mosher was divested of the Japan vellum copies. I think they would have gone quickly and become unavailable. Of course these are all speculative and as is often the case there is likely no definitive proof of anything. But I can see it all the same and the associations of the book, in tandem with it being the first true Mosher and limited all combine to give a plausible explanation.

And yet another bookman in Boston surmised:

From the Meredith point of view, why would Meredith have bothered to order one? I can't see an English author of his stature, particularly a poet, bothering to get another in order to keep one, particularly a bloody signed one from a pirate publisher. He doesn't ask for a second copy in two letters in which he has every normal socially pragmatic opportunity, does he? Plus, he gave her the only copy, on Japan vellum, that's the whole point, right?

I was pleased with their comments and couldn't help but agree, so unless I discover hard evidence to the contrary, this is the copy which Mosher sent to Meredith, and which Meredith had specially bound and presented to Jean Palmer.

So, of the two association copies in the N.-S. catalogue, I did secure the more important Meredith, and I have the autograph dealer, David Holmes, to thank many times over for being there in London to personally secure this book--a kindness which I registered by separately sending David an additional \$100 bill just to punctuate my thankfulness for what he had done. But no collector is ever fully satisfied, for unfortunately the inscribed Bottomley's eluded both me and David.

...but third time's the charm!

The March 2003 issue of *Endpapers* included my essay, "A Cynosure for 2002," in which I described receiving XXX's N.-S catalogue in October and chronicled my disappointment and eventual acquisition of the Meredith. But the Bottomley remained

unobtainable, or at least so I thought until it once again appeared on the Internet's ABE Books offered by the XXX firm with basically the write-up of the N.-S. catalogue:

93. Bottomley, Gordon. *A Vision of Giorgione. Three Variations on Venetian Themes*. Frontispiece. Thomas Bird Mosher, Portland, Maine, 1910. First Edition. One of 50 copies on japan [sic] vellum. Small 4to. Original plain white boards in japan [sic] vellum dust-wrapper printed in red. Dust-wrapper somewhat browned at edges, otherwise a very nice copy with the publisher's advertisement slip loosely inserted. Dedication Copy, inscribed by the author under the printed dedication ("To My Wife") "an old gift and a new, with her husband's love always. Gordon. May 23rd. 1910" and with an eight-line poem in his hand beginning "Where all is yours / What virtue lies in giving?" This was not published in England until 1922.  
£ 300.00

This was not published in England until 1922.

On April 28, 2003 I dashed off an e-mail inquiry with the subject line reading "Bottomley Reappears!!!!" and this brief note:

XXX: Just got notice through ABE that this book is now AGAIN in your possession. At this point, OK with 10% dealer to dealer discount? What happened... was the book returned? Somehow unsold?  
Cheers! Phil MOSHER BOOKS

Minutes later, being unable to contain myself, I telephoned London and was told that there was a mistake in the downloading of the unsold S. N.-S. data to ABE and that the Bottomley was one of those mistakenly listed. Really! For the second time now my heart sunk. How utterly strange that the very same book should reappear a half year later, and then only to be snatched from acquisition by the "sorry--we made an error" news. Salt was rubbed into the wound with the next day's e-mail response from the XXX folks indicating that "the order for the following book(s) has been cancelled..." I was mystified why the book wasn't quoted to me the first time around, and now this phantom listing--all very curious indeed. I fantasized that it was almost like someone said to be sure that if Bishop calls none of the Mosher books are available, or that S. N.-S.'s spirit was hovering over my inquiries determined to jinx any acquisition by me. I could almost hear him saying:

Let that which was sent in plunder,  
be forevermore a point in blunder,  
so that from which abroad was sent,  
shall evermore from that same shore be rent.

On July 20th of 2005 I once again got a phone call from David Holmes of David J. Holmes Autographs in Hamilton, NY, the same dealer who managed to corral that *Modern Love* for me.. We discussed some previous unfinished business and then David got around to the second reason for his call: would I be interested in an inscribed Gordon Bottomley book from the S. N.-S. Collection? You got it! This was the very same book I tried to order two times in the past, once in 2002 and six months later in 2003. David had just returned from his July 2005 trip to London and while there stopped by XXX XXX. Two shelves of S. N.-S. books were still there for sale. He came across the Bottomley and thought it was rather nice and so he bought it without knowing if I had any interest in it. He or anyone else might have thought "apparently not" knowing that it was listed in the

catalogue and I would have had ample time to order it. Then again surely the book would have been offered to me following the two attempts to order it, but it wasn't and to this day I remain completely flummoxed as to why it wasn't. Anyway, the book is now here and joins its N.-S. *Modern Love* mate. Curious too that both books were obtained only through the good auspices of David Homes, without whom I'd never have gotten either inscribed book. David is like a ghost buster, apparently not affected by the unlucky charm surrounding the N.-S. collection with regard to the Mosher collection here in the States. Thank you David!

The significance of this book is manifold. The full hand-written poem by Bottomley:

Where all is yours,  
What virtue lies in giving?  
Though nought endures,  
In writing as in living  
I have given myself to you,  
And, as you take me,  
My poems grow more true,  
More true you make me.  
Gordon.

expressed the close relationship between this revivalist of English verse drama and his wife, Emily, who lovingly supported him during his life-long illnesses--he had experienced poor health since he was nineteen. They lived in a remote country home near the Scottish border and had little social life beyond the couple's daily life together. However, Bottomley's all-pervasive love of literature, and his courage under bed-ridden disability, kept him actively writing poetry and verse drama, and he kept up a lively correspondence--thanks to his wife--with a number of authors and publishers both in England and America, Mosher being one such publisher and admirer of Bottomley's verse. Through it all, Emily was a constant support, and so the printed dedication to her in *A Vision of Giorgione*, and Bottomley's inscription and hand-written original poem, express the intimacy between the two. Furthermore, the book carries the bookplate "From the Emily & Gordon Bottomley Bequest" and the book labels of J. A. N.-S. in addition to S. N.-S. himself. So this Japan vellum copy is distinguished by its association and provenance which earns it a prominent place in the Mosher Collection. The acquisitions from the N.-S. catalogue are now complete, albeit through a long and tortuous route. I certainly harbor no ill will toward to XXX firm nor XXX especially because without their intercession the books might not have been offered for public resale in the first place. Their role was key, and the rest I attribute to a comedy of errors, especially since in a dream S. N.-S. spoke to me saying "see, 'twas not I, nor they, who kept you from these treasures, but only happenstance which I am now pleased has been corrected." Thank you S., thank you XXX, and thank you David Holmes!

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